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Jennifer Brown
Manchester
District 1199NE
Before the Labor Committee

In Support of SB 938 An Act Concerning Unemployment Benefits for Striking Workers

Good Afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Jennifer Brown, I live in Manchester, and I work as a Direct Support Staff (DSS) at Sunrise Northeast. I've been working in the industry for almost twenty-five years. I am here today to urge you to pass SB 938 and give striking workers access to unemployment benefits.

As a DSS, I care for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. I do everything for my clients. When you work in a group home, you become their family, their doctors, their nurses, and their friends. When they're sick, you have to figure out why they're sick. When they're crying, you have to figure out why they're crying. When we go on vacation, they miss us. We become like family to our clients, and that's one of the things I love most about my job.

With that said, group home workers are not appreciated or respected in Connecticut. Working conditions in group homes are incredibly poor. We work long hours in understaffed homes for poverty wages. This work will test you physically and emotionally, not to mention the added stress of struggling to make ends meet outside of work. Even when the legislature allocated more funding for group home services, we could not get the group home agencies to invest those funds into staff wages and benefits, and ultimately client care. Finally, my coworkers and I had enough and decided we needed to go on strike to achieve the change we needed and our clients deserved.

Before going on strike, I would have had to pay \$6,000 a month to get health insurance. Furthermore, I had only gotten one raise in 15 years, and it took a fight. Like many group home agencies Sunrise would not recognize our concerns or act upon them. Striking was the only option we had, and even then it was a hard choice to make. My coworkers and I were nervous about not being able to make ends meet. How would we pay our bills and feed our family while on strike? We were fortunate to have support from our union, 1199, but even then it was hard.

We were angry, stressed out, depressed, and everyday had to face the financial challenges of being on strike. If we had had access to unemployment benefits this wouldn't have been the case. We could have exercised our right to strike as workers without fear of not being able to feed our children. Right now the dynamic between workers and employers favors the employers, and empowers them to exploit the fears of their workers in order to under pay them and provide them

with little to no benefits. This bill would help balance the scales and allow workers to go on strike without risking a financial crisis at home.

Please pass SB 938. Thank you for your time.